

CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

Lord Dhanvantari - Physician of Gods and God of Ayurvedic Medicine (Vedic period)

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Lord Dhanvantari - Nepal, 1977
Hands holding Shankha, Chakra, Amrit and Leech



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Dhanvantari, the Hindu God in the ancient Indian Medicine is comparable to Aesculapius of Greek medicine. *Shrimad Bhagvat* purana states that when ancient demigods (Devas) were in serious peril, they appealed to Lord Vishnu for help. He told the demigods and demons (Asuras) to churn the ocean with the aid of the great Mandar Mountain and serpent *Vasuki*. From the liquid depth of ocean's primeval cosmic life substance, rose the great physician Dhanvantari, clad in a white robe, with a pot of *Amrit* (nectar elixir of immortality) in his hand. He is one of the 14 *Jewels* (ratnas) which made their appearance in the course of this important mythical process of Samudramanthana or Sagar manthana. Amrita was initially snatched by demons but with the help Vishnu in the form of Mohini avatara (incarnation of Vishnu), it was recovered and finally consumed by demigods, who became victorious over demons. This episode is celebrated after every 12 years during the Kumbha mela festival.

Human suffering moved Dhanvantari so much that he desired to be reborn on earth. He made his second appearance, when King Dirghatma of Kashi (Varanasi) practiced great austerities for a son. Born as Prince of Kashi he was known as Kashiraja and Devodasa Dhanvantari. It was Dhanvantari who revealed Ayurveda to the world. He is worshipped today as patron God of all branches of medical science. He systematically divided Ayurveda into eight divisions (astangas), each representing specialities. This system of medicine was further popularised, taught and handed down generations by his disciples, among whom Sushruta was foremost. Sushruta

founded a school of medicine and surgery at Varanasi, training numerous disciples. He later wrote Sushruta Samhita, and is known as father of Indian surgery. Surgical procedures like rhinoplasty and lithotomy, taught to him by Dhanvantari became world famous. Various modern scholars have marvelled by the height scaled by Indian medicine in those times. Dhanvantari teachings are recorded in Agnipurana through the teachings of his famous disciple Sushruta. A voluminous glossary of materia medica in nine sections, known as Dhanvantari Nighantu, though ascribed to Dhanvantari, was probably the work of the later scholars. The name Dhanvantari indicates gift of God to remove human suffering. He showed us path of alleviation of human suffering through his second appearance as Kashiraja. Ayurveda stresses overall promotion of human health and not just the curative aspect of medical science. Modern science today is seen accepting it as alternative medicine in some diseases.

Dhanvantari's birthday is celebrated by practitioners of Ayurveda every year, on Dhanteras, two days before Diwali festival. There are a few dedicated temples to Dhanvantari in South India especially in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, where Ayurvedic medicine is highly patronised and practiced.

As a salutation to memory of this great divine personality, Dhanvantari award is given each year by Government of India to a person who has made significant contribution to the field of medical sciences.

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